boys took more interest and more part in adult occupations and affairs, the emergence of leadership among Ngoni boys of high-ranking families was watched by their elders and recognised by their age mates. This was the formative period when a boy's capacity to succeed his father in a position of authority was carefully observed and judged. The Ngoni had ways of passing over a man who was a physical weakling, a coward in face of danger, a sadistic bully to weaker men, a pursuer of women and a breaker-up of marriages. The *madoda* in a Ngoni village, who appeared to let the boys in the *lamosi* manage their own affairs without interfering, had nevertheless a shrewd idea of who was making good and who was proving disappointing. Their comments, showing continued observation over a long period, were often expressed when two or three friends and age mates from the *lamosi* decided to go off to the south to work together. The *madoda* would then say: 'We hope they will come back soon and not be "lost". So and so is like his father and he will help us here in the village'; or they might comment: 'Good riddance, they were always hanging round the girls—worthless ones, indeed' (see *chaka ndithu*).

It has already been pointed out that there was no circumcision school nor public initiation rite among the Ngoni. At puberty the ritual observed was a private and personal affair. On a boy's first nocturnal emission his age mates informed an older boy in the *lamosi*, who told him to go at once before it was light and bathe in the river, and to do so each morning after an emission. This use of cold water was believed to give a boy strength and virility. The boy was also instructed by the older boys in the *lamosi* on how to behave to his equals and his elders and to women. This stage was called *ukuchayiwa nga' manzi*, 'to be beaten with water', and was not reported to the older people. When the elder people noticed that the boy's voice was breaking, his father inquired whether he had passed puberty and, on being assured of this, he found a man who knew the *ukudengele* medicine. The father killed a goat, and the medicine man took some of the unchewed cud from the goat's stomach, mixed it with the bitter *ukudengele* root and put it on a pan over a fire. This took place near the gate of the kraal or near the parents' hut, with the father and the father's male relatives standing by. When the mixture boiled, the boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the pan one after the other and lick each one quickly. At the same time he kept jumping over the fire and striking his elbows against his sides. The Ngoni believed that this medicine gave boys physical strength and stamina and they administered it to their servants' sons as well. It was still practised in the 1930's among Ngoni who were educated and partly westernized.

While the organization of the *lamosi* catered for all boys from their second teeth till their marriage, including boys from the age sets called *ukutwasa* and *amajaha*, the organization of girls' life followed a

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

to himself: 'Can that be for me? No? Yes? It *is* me. I am ashamed.' No one said anything but the shamed one took the first chance of slipping away to avoid further public notice. The use of proverbs in this way were an effective way of making a child learn for himself and apply the lesson; and with children, as with adults, the use of proverbs was a way of 'saving face' when a direct rebuke in the presence of others would have caused overwhelming shame.

Ngoni ideas about nature and nurture

This fixed code of social behaviour between persons was instilled by Ngoni adults into their children from their early years. By the time they had their second teeth, a significant stage to the Ngoni, they were expected to conduct themselves towards other people according to this code. Their behaviour, in public at any rate, should be predictable, if those responsible for the teaching of 'respect' had carried out their task conscientiously. But, as the Ngoni themselves recognized, it was one thing to have a system of training with a desired goal in view. It was another thing to see how each individual child responded to the training, and either conformed to the code or resisted it. The Ngoni thought that the clue to conformity or resistance lay in the individual's character, and they talked a great deal about the character of their children. Such conversations generally arose when adults were watching a group of boys and girls carrying out a socially required or self-appointed task. They might be bringing back the cattle in the evening, practising for the *ngoma* dance, grinding bulrush millet for snacks for the little children, asking each other riddles or telling a story. Some of the tasks called for intelligence, some for physical strength, some for initiative or organizing ability, some for eloquence.

Character, so the Ngoni thought, came from two sources, inborn qualities and acquired qualities. The first they called *mahadidwe*, literally those things which an individual was born with. These included physical resemblances to their

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

parents, such as colour of skin, shape of face and features, posture and carriage, speaking voice; and the less tangible qualities such as control of temper, power to command others, eloquence in speech, as well as anti-social characteristics such as cruelty, rages, meanness, jealousy. Both kinds of inborn qualities, physical and moral, could come from either parent. In the case of the average child, who was not outstanding in any way, few comments if any were made on his heredity. But if a child showed outstanding ability or powers of leadership, or was on the contrary always quarrelling or showing off or sulking, they looked for an explanation of such qualities in his parentage.

Yet heredity was not in Ngoni thinking the only explanation for a child's character. Nor did they believe that it always followed that a cruel father had vicious sons, nor a mother who was tactful and pacific, daughters showing the same traits. They thought character, though partly inherited, was modified by and moulded by acquired qualities due to training. In the case of bad inherited qualities they could be, it was hoped, corrected by persistent training. When desirable qualities were shown by either or both parents it was always hoped that the child would also show them, and that good upbringing would ensure their development. They were always puzzled when sons of outstanding men and daughters of distinguished women turned out badly.

The acquired qualities were known as *makhalidwe*, the root of which was *khala*. This was a word used in a great many contexts with different meanings in each. In the context of child training it was used to mean to behave, with the added implication that it was what a person was like, due to his behaviour. *Makhalidwe* was used therefore, in the sense of conduct, implying behaviour in all relationships and including what had been acquired through response to training.

As we shall see later, Ngoni elders were afraid to leave a child, especially a girl after the age of seven or so, in her

1: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

mother's household if the mother showed obvious signs of being a 'bad character'. They might take the child away and put her with some relative of acknowledged 'good character', in the hope of offsetting the effects of heredity by careful training.

In later childhood and especially on the threshold of adulthood, as we shall see in Chapters VI and VII, boys and girls were expected to learn and practise traditional Ngoni skills and to be conversant with traditional Ngoni knowledge. Skills and knowledge, or rather the ability to use them, might be inherited from a parent, but they were generally regarded as acquired qualities. In any case, they needed careful training and direction in order that they might be fully developed.

Ngoni cultural values

After the Scottish Mission had been in North Nyasaland for some time, and the Bible and other Christian literature had been translated into the vernacular, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* became one of the most popular and widely read books in Ngoniland, both by older children and by adults. The reason was that its imagery portrayed so many ideas and situations which the Ngoni recognized as being relevant for them in the new world to which they had to adapt themselves. It became for Ngoni Christians, and for many others too since it was told far more often than it was read, a new kind of folk-tale, and was told as such to children in school and in the villages. The themes of striving towards a goal, and fighting lions and giants on the way, and listening to good advice as well as hearing bad—these and other themes were recognized as in the Ngoni tradition although in such a different setting.

In the final chapter of this book we shall talk about personality and character among the Ngoni, looking at the ideas of basic personality as set out by Linton and others, and trying to see how training at different stages of childhood had been converging towards the ideal personality of the Ngoni

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

When the Ngoni talked about the separate ideal personalities of men and women, they emphasized the training needed for younger men, and to some extent also for younger women. Senior men and women were expected to possess special qualities due to their age and status and experience. It was recognized that the limited responsibilities of young men before marriage gave them little authority in village and family affairs. Since each family however was bringing up its girls to leave them on marriage and to take the good name of the family elsewhere, there was less distinction made between the qualities desired in younger married women and older ones than there was between the two groups of men.

The ideal personality of Ngoni women

This had four main aspects: physical capacity and appearance, relationship to her husband and his relatives, competence in household management, and general reputation for justice and wisdom.

We talked in Chapter III about the connexion in Ngoni thinking between women being healthy and strong and being able to bear healthy children. In the marriage negotiations and even at the final ceremony itself in the bridegroom's village, there were formalised standard questions put by the bridegroom's representatives about the health of the girl and her family, and these were replied to also in conventional phrases. Such inquiries about health had been made secretly long before the final ceremony, and indeed before any formal approaches had been made which led to the betrothal. But the fact that they were made in public on two distinct occasions, at the preliminary visit of the man's representatives and at the marriage itself, underlined the importance of health and its relation to child-bearing capacity in the ideal Ngoni woman.

We saw in the last chapter that physical strength for continuous hard manual work in the household and in the

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
/ FR5 Ngoni FR5

827 577 gardens was not required of most Ngoni women, though they were expected to know by experience how to hoe and to pound, to mud walls and to clean a house in order to supervise their helpers and to see that household work was done efficiently.

577 581 [826] [302] [291] In addition to being healthy, the ideal Ngoni woman was always well-groomed. She might lack the facial formation of high cheek-bones, narrow nose and deep-set eyes and the light bronze colouring which were the accepted standards of beauty. Even without these natural, usually inherited, advantages she spent, as we have seen, much time every day taking care of her skin and hair. When she was receiving visitors or sitting outside her hut, her two long cloths, one fastened under the armpits and the other over one shoulder and knotted on the chest, were carefully draped and arranged. If she walked to another compound or out of the village on the road, or walked or danced in any ceremony, her dignity of bearing and poise of head was always marked. She did not hurry, but, as the Ngoni said, 'she walked strongly'. A government official passing an octogenarian Ngoni princess on the road stopped and offered her a lift in his car. She looked him up and down and said: 'Thank you, young man. I can still walk.'

[516] [481]

577 602 Many references have been made already to the relationship between a wife and her husband, and between a wife, especially a young one, and her husband's relatives. The keynotes of this relationship were devotion to her husband, respect for his relatives, and circumspection in her relations with her co-wives and with her non-Ngoni helpers. Jealousy between co-wives was recognized by the Ngoni but not condoned, and the young wife at marriage was warned by her own family against quarrelling with anyone, co-wives, helpers or in-laws, though the last was almost unthinkable.

577 542 Competence in household management, being a successful 'châtelaine', made many demands on a Ngoni woman if she were to live up to what was considered an ideal house

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

577 affairs. Boys and young men were expected to be physically
562 strong, and tough in the sense of being able to do hard tasks,
561 walk long distances, dance for hours on end, and put up
● [827] with hardships without grumbling. The senior men, as we saw earlier in this chapter hated to see idleness and set great store by young men working hard and persistently at any tasks undertaken. Several proverbs illustrated this quality
[538] and were used with effect when boys were found hanging round in the village doing nothing: 'Loitering eats the owner,' 'Laziness is eating dung,' 'The garden will not be tilled if you stop hoeing it.'

577 Other qualities desired in young men were all connected
829 with the values of staying together as a family and as a village group, and of fostering mutual aid and trust within the groups of males in the dormitory and in the 'house'. It was believed that they ought to be acutely sensitive to the opinion of their contemporaries, a lesson which they learned from early days in the dormitory. To an insensitive person, showing intolerance and hard-heartedness they said: 'Were you made with dog's bones?' for dogs' bones were thought
[538] to be hard and unfeeling; or, 'You have a heart like a crocodile.' A fear of social ostracism was fostered all the time and expressed in the proverb: 'The bird eats in his own field.'

577 There were innumerable proverbs about willingness to
829 co-operate in all the necessary tasks which fell to the young
538 men, such as communal hoeing described in Chapter VII, or digging the grave at a funeral. 'The eyes for seeing,' 'One arm cannot crush a louse,' 'A river grows by its little streams,' 'The heifer grows by giving it more food'—these and many others were used to admonish those who held back and to encourage those who joined in willingly. Other proverbs warned against promises of help which were not kept. 'You will eat those of the axe but not those of the hoe' was said to someone who had counted on noisy assertions of forthcoming help, like the sounds made by the chopping of an axe, and not in quiet persistent help, like the smooth almost silent

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

463 fireman in charge of gangs of workers. All this last group
177 involved the earning, spending and sharing of money in-
[434] comes, but even more important in Ngoni eyes, they offered
[571] opportunities of exercising authority, and of controlling and directing others.

624 In local government and in the courts, which formed an
693 integral part of it, the qualities demanded were wisdom, ability to make decisions, expert knowledge of the law, skill in conducting cases and in summing up evidence, and knowledge of the people, so that their reactions to new measures and to difficult court decisions could be forecast. Certain
[827] women were thought of as inheriting this kind of judicial
[562] ability and were often turned to in private by their husbands, sons or brothers and asked to declare themselves in support of or against an important decision and to discuss its merits or demerits.

622 In choosing a successor to a chief the regents who were responsible for the selection looked for particular qualities of individual character as well as for evidence of the ideal Ngoni personality traits. Men who by right of inheritance could have succeeded their father were sometimes passed over because they showed characteristics which would make them a bad chief. This was one of the reasons why sons of leading men were watched so closely and corrected so sharply by the elders of a village who were noting their adjustment to the basic personality pattern as well as their individual character.

There were certain acknowledged ritual activities which demanded of the performer both a high degree of conformity to Ngoni personality patterns and special individual characteristics. On the death of a chief one of his sons or brothers was designated to become head of the 'elder' village which remained behind, when the new chief with some of the members of his father's 'house' moved out to found a new village. The 'one who stayed behind' as he was called was expected to be the epitome of all Ngoni qualities, and to have a good memory for, and an understanding of, Ngoni tradi-